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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000104

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IS
SUBJECT: GAZA SITUATION REPORT, JANUARY 14, 1200

REF: TEL AVIV 90

Classified By: Classified by DCM Luis G. Moreno. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Operation Cast Lead continues with IDF troops moving forward, very slowly, towards the center of Gaza City as talks over a ceasefire, and its terms, continue. Approximately 20 rockets landed in southern Israel overnight, although there were no reports of any damage. Two rockets landed in Northern Israel from Lebanon the morning of January 14. There are no indications that Hizballah was responsible, and Israel responded with directed fire at the launch sites, as it did during a similar incident last week. Social Welfare Minister Issac Herzog has been appointed the coordinator and spokesperson for all humanitarian efforts in the Gaza Strip. Kerem Shalom is open today, with approximately 100 trucks expected, while Karni and Nahal Oz remain closed for security reasons. Erez crossing is open for humanitarian cases. A humanitarian pause has been announced from 1300 to 1600 today. Press reports about a division between PM Olmert, MD Barak and FM Livni over a ceasefire continue, but remain speculation. German FM Steinmeier is making an emergency return to Israel the evening of the January 14 for a renewed push for a humanitarian ceasefire that could create space for a permanent ceasefire. The international community, including the USG, is pressing ICRC regarding what is needed to move forward with the planned evacuation of foreign nationals (including Amcits) from Gaza.

Military Operations

¶2. (U) IDF reports that overnight the IDF targeted over 60 sites last night included 9 weapons storehouses and workshops, mostly under private homes, 5 rocket launching sites, 8 Hamas cells, 35 tunnels along the Philadelphi corridor, and at least one tunnel near the Nahal Oz crossing into Israel. Six soldiers were wounded in combat overnight, including three officers. Israeli press reports that 971 Palestinians have been killed since the operation began, with over 4,250 casualties.

¶3. (U) Press reports indicate 20 rocket struck Israel overnight and this morning from Gaza, including 1 Grad. The reports indicate Palestinian groups other than Hamas have taken credit for most of the attacks. There were no reports of any injuries.

¶4. (C) At least two Katyusha rockets from Lebanon landed near Kiryat Shmona in Northeastern Israel (NOTE: the rockets fired on January 8 from Lebanon landed in Northwestern Israel). An IDF spokesman said Israel responded with three "pin-point attacks" against the source of the fire in the Hatzbaya region. IDF contacts passed to DAO that four artillery shells were fired at the launch area in response.

Humanitarian Situation

¶15. (U) Following a cabinet meeting yesterday, Social Welfare Minister Isaac Herzog was appointed to oversee the coordination for all humanitarian aid into Gaza and for overseeing the resumption of services following a ceasefire. Herzog will be above the Joint Coordination Room (JCR or the Cell) and will harmonize action across the GOI and the international community, including the JCR, COGAT, IDF, MOD, the Ministry of Health, and the Prime Minister's Office. He will also serve as the primary GOI spokesperson on humanitarian efforts.

¶16. (C) MFA DDG Irit Ben Abba told EconCouns on January 14 that Herzog will ensure Minister-level attention to these issues, and will particularly be focused on immediate humanitarian relief efforts once Operation Cast Lead ends. Ben-Abba also noted that Herzog is skilled with the press and should effectively communicate Israel's efforts to protect and assist civilians.

¶17. (U) According to the COGAT, 106 trucks with humanitarian goods entered Gaza strip yesterday, all through Kerem Shalom, including 4 fuel trucks. They are expecting roughly the same number of trucks today. Karni and Nahal Oz will remain closed today due to the security situation around the crossings and the discovery of another tunnel in the area. Erez crossing remains open for humanitarian cases. There are no trucks scheduled to use Erez crossing. The GOI says it is willing to let Erez be used for trucks, but has not found a partner inside Gaza that is willing to pick up goods. COGAT

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says some of the fuel waiting on the Gaza side of Nahal Oz has been picked up. However, most of it remains as the security situation prevents Palestinians from getting to the crossing.

¶18. (U) The GOI reports that an Iranian vessel reportedly carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza turned back on its own before approaching the strip. Press reports in Iran say the Israeli Navy prevented the ship from reaching port, which the IDF denies.

Political Developments

¶19. (U) The media continues to speculate over possible divisions between PM Olmert, MD Barak, and FM Livni regarding a ceasefire. Reports are that Olmert wishes to continue, Barak would like a ceasefire agreement, and Livni would like to stop without an agreement so Israel is free to restart operations whenever necessary. According to the press, Olmert cancelled yesterday's "kitchen cabinet" meeting and has not scheduled a security cabinet meeting for today, which is when such meetings generally occur. Ha'aretz and some other news outlets believe Olmert did this to prevent being pressured into stopping the operation before he is ready.

¶110. (U) Olmert told the press on January 13 that he supports moving forward, saying "we don't want to see another Resolution 1701 like we did in Lebanon" which allows Hamas to rebuild. Journalist Alex Fishman wrote in Yedioth Ahronoth that while the IDF continues its assault, it is moving forward very slowly for several reasons. It is not only to reduce casualties and pressure for reasonable terms for a ceasefire, he speculated, but also because the IDF does not want to completely destroy Hamas before there is an agreement, a situation that would force Israel to reoccupy Gaza.

¶111. (C) German Political Officer Uwe Schmalz told PolOff on January 14 that German FM Frank-Walter Steinmeier is returning to Israel later in the day for an unscheduled trip to push a humanitarian ceasefire that could lead to a lasting

ceasefire. Steinmeier will stay through January 16 and then go to Egypt. Schmalz was unsure what prompted the last-minute decision to return, especially with critical regional elections taking place in Germany (Note: Steinmeier is a candidate for German Chancellor in elections later this year. End Note.). Schmalz added that he understands the initiative will be presented as a joint German-British-French effort. Spanish FM Moratinos remains in Israel today for more meetings, but there is no indication he will be part of the German initiative.

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